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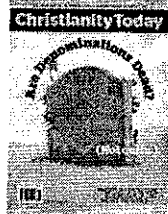
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Moroccan Crackdown

Expulsion of Christians surprises missiologists.
 Bobby Ross Jr. | posted 5/11/2010 09:23AM

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Six years ago, a delegation of evangelical leaders visited the Kingdom of Morocco and hailed it as "open to evangelical Christian outreach." In 2005, country officials even invited the Newsboys, Phil Keaggy, and other Christian artists to stage a three-day music festival in the city* of Marrakech.

The North African country is apparently open no more. In March it deported dozens of foreign Christian workers and foster parents. In addition, the country's 1,000 Christians have faced "significant increased pressure," according to an expert in Muslim-Christian relations who has frequent contact with religious and government leaders in Morocco (and who asked to remain anonymous).

At the Village of Hope orphanage near Ain Leuh, 50 miles south of Fez, the government expelled 16 staff workers, 10 foster parents, and 13 natural-born dependents. Police first came to the orphanage March 6, questioning children and looking for Bibles and evidence of Christian evangelism.

New Zealand native Chris Broadbent, a worker at Village of Hope, said government accusations of proselytizing were unfounded, and that all staff had signed and adhered to a non-proselytizing policy.

"We were a legal institution," Broadbent said. "Right from the start they knew it was an organization founded by Christians and run by a mixture of Christians and Muslims working together."

The change in Morocco's approach to Christian activity "appears to have taken everyone by surprise, ngo leaders and embassy staff included," said Steve Moore, president and ceo of the Mission Exchange. "Informed expatriates with a long history in the country admit their analysis of the political trends have proven to be wrong."

But J. Dudley Woodberry, senior professor of Islamic studies at Fuller Theological Seminary, said it's not a surprise in retrospect. "The number of Christians has continued to grow in North Africa, and this has been publicized abroad," he said. "The Moroccan government, apparently under pressure from the Islamists, is reacting."

Some Christians in Morocco attribute the change to the country's new Minister of

Safety Question

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Justice and Minister of Interior. Others say a strong government faction remains supportive of religious freedom but does not want to be seen as lapdogs for Christians.

Differing interpretations of *proselytism*—which is forbidden in Morocco—could be one problem, Woodberry said.

"While the term is neutral in inter-national law for evangelism or witness, Christian workers in Muslim lands commonly interpret it as using undue pressure or inducements to influence people to change their faith," he said. "Many Muslims, in turn, see it as referring to any form of witness."

**An earlier version of this story incorrectly called Marrakech the capital of Morocco. The capital is Rabat.*

Additional reporting by Compass Direct News

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[Morocco defends expulsion of Christian workers](#) | Morocco says it will take a tough line on proselytism - seeking converts from another religion - two days after it expelled 20 Christian workers. (BBC)

[Christians deported, accused of proselytizing to orphaned children](#) | Morocco's justice minister said earlier that the deported foreigners had exploited the poverty of a number of Moroccan families to convert their minor children to Christianity. (Los Angeles Times)

[In Morocco, a Crackdown on Christian Aid Workers](#) | The Village of Hope deportations are part of what appears to be a widespread crackdown on Christian aid workers in Morocco. (Time)

Previous *Christianity Today* articles on Morocco include:

[Moderating Morocco](#) | Christians combat Muslim fears, stereotypes. (October 20, 2005)

[Q & A: Rich Cizik](#) | Rich Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) on a new initiative in Morocco. (June 1, 2004)

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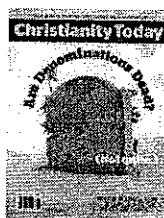
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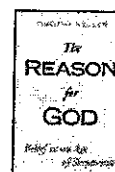
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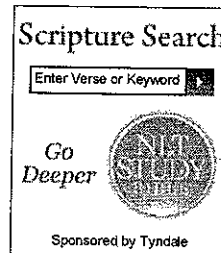


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